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National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

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Iran: Update on the Tudeh Party (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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on 12 August 1980.*

The author of this assessment is [redacted]
Office of Political Analysis. Comments and queries
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The paper has been coordinated with the National
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**Iran: Update on
the Tudeh Party**

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Summary

Despite its efforts to cooperate with the Khomeini regime, Iran's pro-Soviet Tudeh Party has been under attack by Muslim fundamentalists over the last five months. The attacks have been part of a larger crackdown on leftist groups initiated by the Shia Muslim clergy. []

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Nonetheless, the Tudeh has continued to gain strength and recruit new followers. Although too weak to challenge Khomeini openly, the party has established a potentially significant base in the military and in other key sectors of the government. []

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The party has closely followed the Soviet line and maintained contacts with the Communist parties in the USSR and East Germany as well as with Communist parties in the Middle East. The Tudeh's ties to Moscow alienate many Iranians and have impaired the party's efforts to form a broad leftist front. []

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The Tudeh's long-term prospects are fairly promising. The party has benefited from the growing disenchantment in Iran with the failures of the Islamic Republic, and it is probably preparing for the day when the regime is vulnerable. []

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*Tudeh Secretary General
Nureddin Kianuri*

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**Iran: Update on
the Tudeh Party****Tudeh Under Siege**

The pro-Soviet Communist Tudeh (Masses) Party has come under increasing attack since April. The initiative for the attack on the Tudeh, and on the Iranian left in general, has come primarily from the Shia Muslim clergy rather than the government. The clerics, especially those in the Islamic Republic Party, view the left as a major threat to their effort to consolidate their hold on the country.

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The clerics were responsible for initiating a major crackdown on leftist activity in Iranian universities in late April. Two independent leftist groups, the Islamic Mujahedin and the Marxist Fedayeen, were the main targets of this purge. The Tudeh was generally exempt from the crackdown, although Muslim zealots burned the offices of the Tudeh newspaper, *Mardom*, in Tehran on the night of 19 April.

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The unsuccessful US rescue mission led to a brief halt in the offensive against the left as the clerics focused their attention on whipping up anti-American sentiment. But the leftists came under renewed attack in May; the IRP's newspaper, *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, printed a major editorial attacking the Tudeh late in that month. Muslim street gangs sacked the Tehran headquarters of the Tudeh in late July, during protests against Tudeh support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Tudeh's offices in Esfahan and other major cities were also attacked.

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In early August Tudeh offices in Langarud, Bandar-e Anzali, and Rasht in Gilan Province were destroyed by anti-Communist mobs. Gilan is a traditional stronghold of leftist influence in Iran and was the center of a short-lived Communist republic in 1920-21 known as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Gilan.

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that the Tudeh has strong support in the province.

Continued Strengths

Despite these attacks, the Tudeh operates openly in Iran. *Mardom* is still being published and has kept up a steady stream of propaganda attacks on the United

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States and Iranian moderates such as President Bani-Sadr and Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh. The Tudeh has sought to identify itself with Khomeini and the radical wing of the Islamic revolution in order to avoid a full-scale crackdown.

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The Tudeh has traditionally been the best-organized political group in Iran. It has emphasized tight discipline and clandestine organization. The party has numerous front organizations including one for women, another for students, and several workers' associations.

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The party is also recruiting new followers.

that the Communists had benefited greatly from the Khomeini regime's willingness to tolerate it. They claimed that the Tudeh has more than 100,000 members and sympathizers. Tudeh Secretary General Nureddin Kianuri told journalists that *Mardom* has a circulation of some 40,000.

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Although these figures probably are exaggerated, fragmentary evidence suggests that the Tudeh has made significant gains. When the Tudeh emerged from 20 years in the underground after the fall of the Shah, it probably had no more than a few hundred members in Iran and several hundred more in exile in East Germany and the USSR.

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The Tudeh has focused its recruitment effort on several key sectors, including oil workers and government employees. The education and information ministries have been favorite targets, as has the military.

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Activity in the Military

The extensive purges in the military since the revolution have provided fertile ground for the Tudeh to cultivate. Many officers are disillusioned with Khomeini and the clerics, and the regime's security

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apparatus is too weak to prevent Communist penetration. [redacted]

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The Tudeh has attempted to use its position in the military to insinuate itself into a position of influence with the Khomeini regime. Bani-Sadr has said that the Tudeh provided information to the regime that helped uncover a military coup plot. [redacted]

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There is no evidence that the Tudeh currently is planning to use its assets in the military to stage a coup. The party, however, has doubtless studied the example of its Afghan counterpart, which seized power in April 1978 with the support of only a few hundred well-placed officers in a 100,000-strong military. The party presumably uses its military apparatus to provide intelligence to the Soviets, as earlier Tudeh military organizations did, and to prepare for the day when the regime is more vulnerable. [redacted]

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Public Position

Tudeh Secretary General Nureddin Kianuri and other party leaders have reacted to attacks on the Tudeh by arguing that the crackdown is inspired by US-supported counterrevolutionaries. Kianuri has called for a major purge of the Revolutionary Guards and Revolutionary Committees to remove alleged US agents. [redacted]

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The party leadership supports Ayatollah Khomeini publicly on all key issues. Kianuri also claims that Khomeini has been misled into supporting the attacks on the left by President Bani-Sadr and that the Ayatollah's health problems have "kept him isolated from everyday political realities." [redacted]

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Contacts with Other Leftists

The Tudeh has long sought to unite the Iranian left under its leadership in a broad national front. Most Iranian leftists are too wary of the Tudeh's ties to Moscow to join with it. The party has succeeded in recent months, however, in enticing a few leftists from other groups to move closer to its position. [redacted]

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Leadership Quarrels

The 63-year-old Kianuri is a strong proponent of close ties to the Soviets, and he has a reputation for slavishly following the Soviet line on all key issues. He has often been accused of being a Soviet agent. [redacted]

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Perhaps in reaction to the attacks on the left in April, Kianuri has come under criticism within the Tudeh for his policy of backing Khomeini. The critics are led by Reza Radmanesh, former secretary general of the party in the 1950s, who has contemptuously referred to his rival as Ayatollah Kianuri. Radmanesh recently returned to Iran and is said to be challenging Kianuri for control of the party. [redacted]

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The 80-year-old Radmanesh is a respected party statesman who has shown a willingness to challenge Khomeini and has advocated at least the appearance of a more independent line from the Soviets. Essentially he is fairly close to the Soviets, but he is said to have argued that the party's slavish obedience to Moscow has cost it support. [redacted]

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The Soviet attitude toward Radmanesh is not clear. He [redacted] visited Moscow this spring, presumably to seek Soviet advice. The Soviets, however, have continued to replay Kianuri's statements on the Iranian situation, suggesting their endorsement of his leadership. [redacted]

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In any event, the Soviets almost certainly will play a substantial role in any leadership struggle, as they did last year when they helped place Kianuri in power. In view of Moscow's dissatisfaction with Tehran's increasingly anti-Soviet propaganda and Iran's growing role in Afghanistan, Soviet support for Kianuri's removal could signal an increased Soviet willingness to confront the Khomeini regime. [redacted]

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Ties With Foreign Communists

The Tudeh gets most of its outside support from the USSR and East Germany, both of which supply financial aid and other forms of assistance. The Tudeh maintains bases of support in Leipzig in East Germany

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and Baku in the USSR in case it has to go underground again. []

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The party also has extensive contacts with several Middle Eastern Communist parties. []

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The Communists could present a more immediate threat if the left unifies its major components. A broad leftist alliance of the Fedayeen, Mujahedin, and Tudeh seems unlikely, but if it occurred, it would compel the government to move rapidly to head off the challenge. The threat would be even more serious if the left gained support from Iran's ethnic minorities, many of whom—including the Kurds and Turkmen—have traditionally been leftist oriented. [] 25X1

Prospects

Despite the attacks on its headquarters and offices, the Tudeh's long-term prospects are promising. It is probably strong enough to survive the current crackdown, and it probably could maintain a viable underground organization if the regime moved more strenuously against it. []

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The crackdown on the left has probably increased the chances that the various elements of the left will move closer together to survive. Rumors are already circulating in Tehran that the Mujahedin and the Tudeh have been in contact to discuss working together. [] 25X1

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The party benefits from the continuing decay of the Iranian economy, which serves to alienate more and more Iranians from the Khomeini regime. The Islamic cultural revolution proclaimed by Khomeini in April also is driving growing numbers of middle class Iranians and secularists toward the left. []

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The Tudeh both benefits and suffers from its ties to Moscow. While it gains outside backing, close ties to the USSR alienate many nationalists in Iran who see the Tudeh as no more than an appendage of the Soviet Union. []

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The Tudeh will probably bide its time and prepare for the day—perhaps Khomeini's death—when a challenge to the clerics could have some chance of success. In the meantime, it hopes to insinuate itself into positions of influence and power. []

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